

Strategies to Projects: *Building a Common Understanding*

CURRENT SITUATION - DESCRIPTION

Where have we been and where are we going?

- **LE Strategies are Important**

At last year's lead entity workshop in Wenatchee, participants validated the importance and value of using a strategic approach for salmon habitat protection and restoration at the watershed level. The group reached agreement on twelve core questions or elements to incorporate into their strategies, in their project prioritization, and in coordinating with other related efforts. The group acknowledged the importance of developing strategies that balance technical and community socio-economic elements. Lead Entity strategies are a guide to increase the certainty of producing meaningful results and maximize the use of limited funds by spending money where it is needed most and in the right sequence.

Also at last year's workshop, participants began to consider the relationship between the LE role and regional salmon recovery planning. LE strategies will provide the components of portions of their watershed's chapter for the regional recovery plan.

The state Technical Panel (Tech Panel) is mandated by the SRFB, as stated in the *SRFB Mission, Roles and Responsibilities, and Funding Strategy*, to "assess the LE's understanding of the watershed, its strategy for prioritizing habitat protection and restoration projects, and how the LE ranked list of projects is supported by that strategy." This means that LE projects are evaluated by the panel in relation to the LE's written strategy as well as by the criteria: benefit to salmon and certainty of success.

Therefore, LE strategies are critically important for providing guidance within the watershed, for securing funding from the SRFB for high priority projects, and for contributing to the regional salmon recovery plan for their watershed.

- **Building on Previous Efforts**

At this year's workshop, participants will have an opportunity to build on the work begun at last year's event to further clarify and sharpen how to improve LE strategies. This year, SRFB and Tech Panel members will attend along with LE representatives and watershed stewards. The goal is to work together to reach a common understanding of what Lead Entity strategies can and should contain and how they are used.

Situation Description: What are we trying to address?

The SRFB, the Tech Panel and LE's have different perceptions and expectations about the content and use of LE strategies and about the role of the Tech Panel in the project evaluation process. Everyone shares the common goal of wanting to protect and restore habitat for the greatest benefit to the fish with the greatest certainty of success. However, high, medium and low criteria for benefit to fish and certainty of success are defined or understood differently by the individuals applying them. The local LE process often uses different evaluation criteria and standards than the Tech Panel in both their Technical and Citizens' committees. Additionally, state and local technical panels have different perceptions and opinions about how to interpret and use data and which technical tools are best for various purposes.

Tech Panel perceptions are that many LE strategies are not specific enough to help guide the panel's evaluation process. Some of the elements missing in strategies from the panelists' point of view include: not enough specificity about priority geographic areas or actions (specific watershed processes to restore and/or protect), little socio-economic or non-technical analysis to explain the rationale for why certain projects were proposed if they had less technical merit than others, and no timelines to show the sequence of project prioritization.

The SRFB relies heavily upon the Tech Panel's review and assessment and echoes some of the same concerns listed above. Additionally, the SRFB's primary role (as defined in the *SRFB Mission, Roles and Responsibilities, and Funding Strategy*) is to "help ensure the best possible investment of state and federal funds in salmon recovery activities, provide accountability for those investments, and provide citizen oversight to the funding process." The SRFB needs a robust evaluation process to ensure that public moneys are being used in the most effective way possible, "reflecting current local priorities and using the best available science."

The LE's have local technical advisory panels (TAG's) comprised of scientists with equivalent credentials and expertise to those of the state Tech Panel. They also have citizen advisory groups (CAG's) that evaluate projects on the basis of socio-economic criteria relevant to their area. The Tech Panel's and TAG evaluations frequently do not agree. Often this is just a matter of degree, while occasionally very divergent opinions on scientific merit exist. The LE's perception is that this discrepancy is due in part to the Tech Panel's lack of understanding of the LE's qualifications and rationale for rating and ranking projects, as well as inadequate knowledge of their local watershed.

Many LE's find that the SRFB's benefit and certainty criteria are defined in such general terms as to make it difficult to know how the Tech Panel will rate their projects (and thus how they should evaluate their projects at the local level according to this criteria). Furthermore, LE's don't understand the decision-making process or criteria regarding how final project cuts are made by the IAC.

Some LE's would like to move toward a SRFB process that allows those LE's who have matured in their development to become qualified to assume more responsibility, accountability and local control. Others appreciate the outside perspective offered by the Tech Panel and do not feel they are ready to take on all ownership of projects' technical merit. The Tech Panel sets a high bar that many locals use to double-check their work and assumptions.

As the regional salmon recovery efforts get underway and build in momentum, there is an increased need to better understand the relationship between the LE strategies and the watershed chapters for the regional plans. While LE's themselves may not be responsible for regional recovery plans, in many cases the same people are involved in LE's and in regional salmon recovery planning. Therefore, they may be under pressure to produce regional plans as well as make changes to LE strategies within the same short timeframes. Since LE strategies and the regional recovery plans are closely related, it is important to keep the connections between them in mind when working on either one and when considering decisions about changes in the LE/SRFB process.

Workshop Purpose and Goals: How can we make progress?

There is general agreement that LE strategies are critically important no matter how other aspects of the LE/SRFB process evolve as well as for regional salmon recovery planning. Therefore, this year's workshop planning steering committee has chosen to focus on the following purpose, goals and outcomes:

Lead Entity Workshop Purpose: To work together to reach a common understanding of what Lead Entity strategies can and should contain and how they are used.

Workshop Objectives:

- To clarify and refine what should be contained in lead entity strategies (criteria for content and specificity).
- To clarify how strategies are used now and in the future, and by whom.
- To solicit feedback about ways to improve the project evaluation process.
- To explore how lead entity strategies fit into regional salmon recovery planning.

Workshop Outcome:

- Feedback about ways to improve the project evaluation process to an identified working group.
- A policy recommendation to the SRFB to consider during the summer of 2003 based upon the agreements reached by participants at the workshop.
- A greater understanding of how LE strategies fit into regional recovery plans.